

Confronting the Unimaginable: CISM Lessons Learned in the Wake of the Newtown Tragedy

Sergeant Troy Anderson
Connecticut State Police
State Coordinator,
STOPS Program
State Troopers Offering Peer Support

STOPS Program

(State Troopers Offering Peer Support)

- 90 Peer Support personnel statewide
- CISM (East and West Teams)
- Military Support Program
- Family Support Initiative
- Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT)

STOPS Program

- 92 recruited, selected, trained and credentialed Peer Contacts statewide
- Sworn and Non-sworn personnel
- More than 7000 contacts.
- **CONFIDENTIAL** services

CISM Teams

- Program Coordinator
- Logistical/Training Coordinator
- Clinical Coordinator
- Chaplaincy Representatives
- 20 Team members
- Only ALL law enforcement CISM team in the State of Connecticut.

CISM: Train for the worst and hope for the best...

- Teams mobilized on a quarterly basis for training.
- Mock debriefings based on *worst* case scenarios.
- Emphasis placed on team members being interchangeable
- Outside instructors and clinicians brought in for staff support and continuing education



Sandy Hook Elementary School Newtown
What no one could have expected

The Response



STOPS CISM Teams

- Secure the scene.
- Locate and contact exposed responders.
- Immediately establish a respite area.
- Bring the responders together.
- Have CISM team set up a second respite center away from the scene.
- Staff both respite locations with trained clergy, peer support and mental health.

STOPS CISM Teams

- Assign a team member to record and track exposed responders identity and location.
- Transport those responders from the scene as soon as practical to the remote respite center.
- No responder secures without contacting the CISM Team.

STOPS CISM Team

- Assign CISM liaisons as needed to specialized units who have protracted exposure (tactical units, criminal investigators, etc.) with an eye on long term staffing considerations.
- Limit CISM Team exposures if possible
- Begin mobilizing CISM Team members for a prolonged debriefing period.

STOPS CISM Team

- When scheduling debriefings remember:
- Thorough notification process
- Homogeneous groups
- Multiple statewide locations (if necessary)
- Host outside agencies
- Don't forget spouses and significant others
- Keep debriefing (until they stop coming)

Always take care of your team!

“A leader is someone who
demonstrates what’s possible”

Mark Yarnell

Mission First, People Always

- Debriefings can continue for weeks
- Groups can be large
- Emotionally charged and demanding
- Team meetings before and after all CISD
- Team member “Buddy” system
- Rotate CISM team members out (break)
- Post Action Staff Support
- More than 33 debriefings (100 + hours)

Lessons Learned

Things don't always go as
planned...

Lessons Learned

- Pre-education about what your CISM Team *is* and what it *is not* is key

Lessons Learned

- Be prepared to have your CISM Team members pulled in many directions

Lessons Learned

- Tragedies are magnets for helpers!

Lessons Learned

- CISM Teams will arrive from all around the region, state and the nation.

Lessons Learned

The word “DEBRIEFING” will be used in every imaginable context. Clarify as necessary.

Lessons Learned

- By sticking to the integrity of the model the best results will be achieved.

Lessons Learned

- Please remember to take care of **yourself**
- Sleep
- Eat well
- Exercise
- Meditate
- Talk about it
- EMDR

Team Follow-up

- Have a 30 day check in for exposed personnel.
- Schedule a resilience and education day by the end of the 60 day window.
- Organize PCIS (Post Critical Incident Seminars) beginning at the 6 month point.
- Don't forget that anniversaries of the event are significant.



Never lose sight of why you do what you do

May God bless the children, educators and administrators of Sandy Hook Elementary School, their families, the community of Newtown, Connecticut and the brave heroes who responded on December 14, 2012.

SGT Troy Anderson
Connecticut State Police
State Coordinator,
STOPS Program
Office: 860 706-5627
Cellular: 860 335-0105
troy.anderson@ct.gov